

Volvo Truck workers in Virginia overwhelmingly reject second UAW-backed contract

Jerry White
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Latest breaking news: "Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia renew strike after defeating second UAW sellout deal." *Volvo workers can contact the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee by email at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text at (540) 307-0509.*

Volvo Truck workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia on Sunday decisively defeated a six-year labor agreement proposed by the United Auto Workers. The result was overwhelming, with 90 percent of hourly workers and 91 percent of salaried workers rejecting the pro-company deal.

Workers reported that the turnout among the nearly 3,000 workers at the plant was even larger than the first vote on May 16, when 91 percent of hourly workers and 83 percent of salaried workers voted "no." In the days leading up to Sunday's vote, the statement by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee calling for a "no" vote was widely circulated throughout the factory.

After being forced to accept deep concessions over the last three UAW contracts, workers are determined to overturn the multi-tier wage and benefit system, win substantial pay improvements, and oppose attempts to impose higher healthcare costs, a 10-hour workday and reductions in retiree benefits.

Top UAW national and regional officials who were invited by Volvo management to campaign for the contract inside the factory on Friday were met with anger and derision by workers when they claimed there was no money to improve the deal.

While demanding further givebacks from workers, Volvo Truck's parent company, Swedish-based Volvo Group, is planning to hand out roughly \$2.3 billion to shareholders, the proceeds from the sale of its Japan-based subsidiary UD Trucks. This comes on top of the

company's largest dividend payment in its history earlier this year of approximately \$3.68 billion.

Volvo workers told the *World Socialist Web Site* that there was an overwhelming sentiment for a struggle. "People are too mad, too eager, and they want this to be taken care of now," said one worker. "The union bigwigs went into the plant to talk and change everyone's minds, but it backfired. [Local 2069 President] Matt Blondino said he was sorry they couldn't get a better contract, but we had to pay more for health insurance because the pay scale was going up."

The worker added: "One worker who lost \$7 an hour in 2008 told Blondino, 'You shoved these givebacks down our throats and told us times were lean and we had to help. You're still screwing us when the company is making billions.' Right now, the union is not held in high regard. People are annoyed with them making excuses for the company and want to get them out of there. This company is paying out billions in dividends to its investors, and they have to share the wealth with the people who are making them the money."

Speaking about the role of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, the worker said, "The committee played a big part in this. If it wasn't for the statements, it wouldn't have kept everyone going. Every day, workers were going to your website [the WSWS]. Staying informed and having a committee was a big deal. Our statements kept everyone informed and engaged."

Now workers need a strategy to take the fight forward, he said, warning that the UAW was going to keep coming back with rotten contracts. "I don't know

what crap they're going to bring back. Some of the old heads say it'll take 2-3 more rejections before they bring back anything better. This should have been taken care of years ago. I don't think the UAW wants us to strike. We technically could be on strike right now. There will probably be some notice posted on the local's Facebook page by tomorrow afternoon.

"It's going to be a fight to get away from them [the UAW] and build something new. But everybody wants something. We all stuck together. We have to keep giving out the committee statements.

"Hard times are coming, and the stock market could crash. In the past few years, people's eyes have been opening. It's not just Volvo, it's the coal miners in Alabama, it's the people in India who are no different from us. They work just as hard as we do."

Another Volvo worker said, "This is another vote to show we are not happy with their crappy contracts. They are going to have to try a little harder. If they bring back another rotten one, we'll vote it down too.

"The UAW really pushed hard for this to pass. One worker recorded a video of him confronting a union official over cuts to retiree benefits. He said, 'Everybody in this plant at some point is going to be a retiree. The company is just trying to starve them and put them in poverty.' Not too much later, they pulled the video off the internet."

"The committee definitely helped defeat this contract. It raised awareness and gave the workers a voice to express their growing sentiment against the company and the union. They saw the open letter [to UAW officials] and other statements of opposition. They were angry that the company is handing out dividends to the rich and giving us handouts.

"The big question is: Where do we go from here? The rumors are that Volvo might be running out of parts soon and would rather have us out on strike than have us on unemployment benefits."

Another worker added, "I love it, everyone is sticking together." He said the UAW leaders will still get good pay if there is a strike while workers will be getting "\$275 a week in strike pay instead of making \$800-1000 a week they are used to."

In a statement released Friday, titled, "We need a strategy to win!" the VWRFC rejected efforts by the UAW to intimidate workers with threats of a long, futile strike. "We say that a strike is our weapon. It

must be used to threaten the company, not the workers." It outlines a strategy to win a fight against the company, including the unification of the struggle at Volvo with the struggles of other sections of the working class.

The massive defeat at the NRV plant is the latest expression of growing opposition among workers throughout the US and internationally, enormously intensified by the ruling class response to the pandemic. These struggles are developing in direct conflict with the corporatist trade unions.

In Alabama, 1,100 coal miners have been on strike against Warrior Met for two months after overwhelmingly rejecting a contract backed by the United Mine Workers of America. In Sudbury, Ontario, 2,400 miners walked out against Vale Inco after rejecting a contract backed by the United Steelworkers, which agreed to a special one-year contract in June 2020 to keep workers on the job during the pandemic.

Other significant struggles include those of nurses in Massachusetts and steelworkers at ATI in Pennsylvania and other states; teachers and bus drivers in Brazil; auto workers in India; and copper miners in Chile.

The development of these struggles into a coordinated counteroffensive against the ruling class requires the building of a network of rank-and-file committees like that established by workers at Volvo. To this end, the International Committee of the Fourth International has initiated the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Volvo workers: Contact the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee by email at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text at (540) 307-0509.



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